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CIA's Casey Part Of Larger Problem

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CIA Director William J. Casey received an endorsement of sorts last week from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. "Based upon the staff review to date, and Mr. Casey's lengthy testimony, it is the unanimous judgment of the committee that no basis has been found for concluding that Mr. Casey is unfit to serve as DCI... There will be, in timely fashion, a final report dealing with the issues concerning Mr. Casey's past activities, and also with the appointment of Mr. Max Hugel."

The week before Sen. Barry Goldwater, chairman of the committee, had called for Casey's resignation, but over last weekend the director launched a publicity counterattack, and with the committee's report appears a survivor for now.

Observers noted it was not a positive call to the Reagan administration to keep Casey, and there will still be the "final report" on Hugel, whom Casey appointed director of covert operations but who resigned when questions were raised about his past financial dealings. Casey himself is appealing a federal judge's ruling that he and others misled investors in a 1968 business deal.

Dr. Harry Howe Ransom, a Vanderbilt University professor, has observed the U.S. intelligence community for years and is considered one of the foremost academic experts on the CIA. In an interview last week, he said the "Casey problem is not just a Casey problem. It's a problem that our presidents do not understand the importance of intelligence and have made careless decisions about the leadership of the CIA."

Casey, he suggested, would have made a better postmaster general than director of Central Intelligence. The following is a transcription of the interview with Ransom:

Q: William Colby, a former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, said when William J. Casey was first picked that he had an "unique and appropriate background" for the job. He pointed to Casey's service not only in the OSS, but also as a tax lawyer, SEC chairman and undersecretary of state. Casey was also active in organizations like the Veterans of Foreign Intelligence. What should Congress look for in the CIA director?

A: I was looking at the list of directors. There have been 13 directors of the CIA since 1947. There have been a number of categories we can classify. Six of these 13 have been military professionals, three have been intelligence professionals, if you include Allen Dulles—he had been deputy director two years before he became director. There have been two I classify as outsiders. That is to say: John McCone, who was a businessman and had been head of the Atomic Energy Commission, as was James Schlesinger, who was a PhD in economics and also former director of the budget. Then there have been two politicians—George Bush and Casey. I would have to classify

Casey as a politician rather than an outsider.

Casey first came into political prominence in the Nixon campaign. He helped raise a lot of money. That was his role with Reagan—he got the campaign organized and raised a lot of money. That's why I call him a politician even though he has held important positions in government. I think he was appointed to those positions as a reward for his political efforts.

I would have to say as a generalization that the outsiders and the intelligence professionals have probably done a far better job overall.

Q: Why have the professionals and the outsiders done a better job?

A: I think it may have less to do with their professions and experience, and more to do with their character, their intelligence and their personality. It boils down to the care and judgment which the President and his advisers use in choosing a person to head the agency.

I would say the President should regard the directorship of the intelligence agency as important as the chief justiceship of the United States. It is clear to me that hasn't been the case.

In my own view, that person should serve for a fixed term, say six or nine years that would overlap administrations.

It was not until Jimmy Carter's administration that it was assumed that a new incoming administration would appoint a new director of CIA. Until that time, that office didn't usually change with administrations, which I think is the way it should be.

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